

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Memorandum of Conversation

DATE: May 20, 1955

SUBJECT: Exploitation of the Soviet Press for Biographic Information

FOIAb3b

PARTICIPANTS: CIA/FDD - [REDACTED]
CIA/OCI - [REDACTED]
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The immediate problem posed for the group was a request by the American Embassy in Moscow for a basic directory of U.S.S.R. Personalities occupying certain all-union and republic posts, such directory to be kept current through monthly revision notices. According to the Embassy this directory would strengthen its ability to inform Washington rapidly concerning important politico-biographic developments reported in the Soviet press. The cabling of alerts on such developments is something which both State/BI and CIA/OCI desire to encourage.

State/BI representatives expressed a willingness to undertake the compilation of a directory as requested by the Embassy, but noted that such a compilation, and especially the problem of keeping a directory current, prompted a re-examination of the existing system for exploitation of the Soviet press for biographic information. That system, whereby the press is exploited in CIA/FDD on hectomaster mats, and the mats then reproduced in CIA/Reproduction, has improved in quality of exploitation during the past two years and indeed has worked very satisfactorily. The one problem still unsolved is that of getting current and staying current in coverages. Supplying a directory and monthly revision notices to Moscow, however, cannot be done unless currency of press coverage is achieved and maintained, at least on the more important categories of biographic information, handling priority items on a priority basis.

It was agreed that a necessary step in the priority handling of the 20-odd press sources which come to Washington would be to screen these papers as soon as they reach Washington, noting items of priority interest for intelligence purposes and carding and reproducing such items on a priority basis.

After discussion, the participating representatives agreed, subject to receiving administrative approval, to establish a temporary or trial arrangement to meet the problem, such arrangement to be re-examined after it has operated for a month or two or at such time as CIA/FDD can liquidate its current backlog of Soviet press holdings. Under this arrangement the participating representatives agreed to assume the following responsibilities:

1. CIA/FDD

- a. Route papers to State/BI as soon as possible after their receipt in Washington, starting with the April 15th issue of each paper.
- b. Detail one or more members from the present FDD translating unit to work in State/BI and handle priority items in collaboration with the BI/Staff.
- c. Check with CIA/Reproduction on their views of this arrangement for priority processing (the use of 4x6 hecto mats, the reproduction and distribution of cards from the mats, and the supply of 5x8 cards to State/BI).
- d. Assume responsibility for coding and controlling mats cut on priority items.

2. State/BI

- a. Screen newspapers on an urgent basis, marking all items, distinguishing between the routine and the priority materials.
- b. Provide facilities and training for FDD personnel on detail in State/BI.
- c. Reproduce and distribute (to BI and OCI) cards on priority items.
- d. Attempt to compile a directory as requested by Embassy Moscow with a cut-off date of July 1, 1955.

3. CIA/OCI

- a. Furnish State/BI with lists of targets for routine and priority handling, also for inclusion in the proposed directory.
- b. Lead whatever other assistance may prove feasible for the operation of a priority carding system.

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